

ISLAMIC BACKGROUND, MOTIVATION OF RESISTANCE EXAMINED

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[Article by Olivier Roy: "Islam in the Afghan Resistance"]

[Text] There is no war of resistance without a mobilizing ideology. Nationalism in Afghanistan is too closely connected to the state and the former government elites of the Pashtuns tribes to be a mobilizing ideology for a peasant people who never identified with the nation-state. On the contrary, Islam plays a fundamental role in the sense of cultural identity. Yet how could Islam which, during the time of the Dasmachis,* only fight a rear guard action in the face of triumphant Bolshevism, not only mobilize the people, but help them find new forms of organization capable, if not of vanquishing, at least of discouraging the Soviets about their victory? To understand this, we will examine the traditional forms which Islam took in Afghanistan and the changes they are undergoing in the war because of the scholars' recovery of power and the emergence of young fundamentalist intellectuals. We think that, if there is a dynamism capable of reinforcing the resistance, it is there, even if we cannot obviously predict where this dynamism will lead nor how the contradictions which it creates will be solved.

The Clergy

As in all Sunnite countries, there is no organized clergy in Afghanistan. The village mullah has no special powers; chosen among the villagers for his more or less vague knowledge of ritual prayers, he farms his land like the others. Paradoxically, it was not the high clergy who tried to control the mullahs' fitness, but the state (institution of an examination, quickly abolished, by King Amanullah.

The "high clergy" is no more organized, although the community of studies could create the feeling of belonging to a body. It is made up

* Anti-Soviet resistance in Russian Turkestan (1918-1933).

of doctors of law (Olamas), mullahs with advanced training (Mulavis) and Islamic judges (Quazis). From traditional schools (in Pakistan or indeed at Al Azhar in Cairo for the most gifted) and trained according to an age-old course common to the entire Moslem world (classical Arabic, theology (Kalam), the interpretation of the Koran (tafsir), tradition of the prophet (hadith) and Moslem law (fiqh)), they feel more as if they belong to the Moslem community (Umma), rather than to a particular nation. Although a culture of commentary and repetition, it is a universalist culture and this traditional training makes them scholars rather than priests.

Deprived of church properties (waqfs) by Amir AbuRahman in the late 19th century, the scholars do not form an economic class and live on governmental subsidies (in Kabul), gifts or family income. They supported the amir of Kabul whenever they thought he was protecting Islam in the struggle against Russian and English imperialism but fought the amir whenever he seemed to be introducing dangerous innovations (like Amanullah in 1928 or Zaher in 1970). Their alliance with the important tribal families, the traditional pillar of the monarchy, was purely circumstantial. The scholars did not share either the glorification of the Pashtuns' values nor the nationalism (identified indeed with Pashtunism) of these families. For the scholar, the nation is not an end in itself but an instrument to defend religion. For the monarchy, religion is a means of legitimation. So during the struggle against foreigners, there was cooperation but beginning in 1933 when the monarchy, supported by the important families, launched into a modernization campaign necessarily accompanied by cautious secularization, the scholars distanced themselves increasingly and entered into quiet opposition in the 60's. It makes no sense to speak of an alliance between the clergy and the feudal lords.

The scholars' political concepts are very traditional. As such, they have no vocation to power, although they have an acute sense of embodying Islamic legitimacy. We must qualify the idea that Islam does not recognize the separation between the spiritual and the temporal. Islam has always acknowledged the existence of a temporal power (sultan, king or president) from which develops a state apparatus (hokumat or government), endowed with its own law (qanun) with its punishments (ta'zir) and to which the individual owes loyalty. The sultan must act in accordance with Islam but this conformity implies a certain exteriority which the fundamentalist rejects. The scholars have the duty to verify the conformity of politics (siasat) with the (shar'iat) and advise the prince by advice (nasihat) or consultations (fatwa). In this spirit King Nadar in 1931 established the assembly of Ulemas (Jam'iat al Ulema) to verify conformity with Islamic laws.

Although the scholars encouraged the resistance very early on, they had no particular model. Let us mention, however, the emergence in the 60's within the group of scholars of the "professors".

Traditionally trained, they were interested in philosophy and tried to form a modern political theory of Islam, the successors of Sa'id Qotb, Maududi and Ali Shari'ati. These professors, like Niazi and Rabani (current president of the Jam'iat-e Islami) reportedly greatly influenced high school and college students in Kabul who turned openly to fundamentalism. Before discussing the latter, let us examine the traditional forms of religiosity in Afghanistan.

Popular Religiosity

It is not enough to say the religion impregnates the life of the Afghan peasant. It provides the intellectual horizon, the system of values and also the code of behavior. The idea of tradition does not mean immobility for the peasant but conformity to an ethical model: the imitation of the prophet, a way of life, the gestures and even the clothing (sunnati means both traditional and imitation of the prophet). It is of little importance that this tradition is more imaginary than real, that innovation is constant and that the ethic is regularly scoffed at. What counts is that this image gives the peasant language and access to the universal which the modern nation is incapable of giving. We must see the Afghan peasant with a government official: humble and disoriented by procedures and goals which he does not understand, he is silent. Before the Quazi, despite his deference, he speaks because the references are the same, as well as the values and means of communication (the word).

Religion is also a weapon against the state, always exterior and oppressive.* The state has no legitimacy for the peasant: his reference is always below (ethnic group, tribe) or above (Umma). The state means taxes and force. The peasant then is seeking references to an "Islamic economy," a simpler tax system whose goal is clear. Given once for all, these rules will stand in opposition to the continual variations of the state's taxation system. Moreover, the peasant opposes the state's interventionism (monopoly, control of mines and forests, obligatory crop cultivation like cotton). There is, then, in the resistance an economic grievance aimed not at the landlord but the state in the name of Islam. This economic and spiritual component is one reason for the dynamism of the resistance.

Finally, confronted with legal procedures based on the written law of the city, the application of Islamic law is, for the peasant, rapid, understandable and, above all, oral: he can speak out, defend himself, he knows the system and he belongs to it. The West's horror about the punishments called for by the Shar'iat is somewhat hypocritical; let us mention the peasant from Kabul, sentenced under the former government

* See the remarkable article by Pierre and Micheline Centlivres in "Commentaire" [Commentary], number 16.

to 10 years in prison who preferred to appeal to an Islamic court, have his hand cut off and leave a free man. This is not barbarity at stake but the image of the body.

Islam in the Resistance

Guerrilla warfare does not depend on the combatants but first on the civil society, its mobilization and organization. Administration, justice, provisioning, training and the morale of the population must be handled. In the areas where this task is truly done, Islam is providing the framework for the organization. Certainly, there is great diversity. The tribal areas* follow their traditional code more, but the war is less effectively waged there and society more unstable (southern Afghanistan, Paktia). As for small fronts led by the "progressive" intellectuals, when they are not a sheer propaganda invention of leftist emigres (like the Nuristan front), they are marginal in all respects (the Nimroz front has never been near a Soviet).

The war has led to a profound change in the social relationships in nontribal areas. The traditional economic leaders (Khan and Malik), the central government's driving force, have disappeared. New officials have emerged. Primarily the scholars, whom I mentioned above, but also the young fundamentalist intellectuals who returned to their native villages. Let us see how they made Islam a principle to organize and mobilize civil society.

The basic principle of the fundamentalists is the return to the Shar'iat. For the peasant (who does not necessarily live like a fundamentalist), this return is above all the introduction of political clarity. As we saw, Islam allows the peasant to speak publicly: he can speak on justice and power. Those who talk about alienation think that liberty is primarily the goal of externalizing politics. The leaders of the various underground forces (or amirs) are chosen by a kind of consensus, approved by the scholars. The individual who is supported only by the authority of weapons or a party is unfortunate: in the latter case, he will see the local population join the rival party en masse. Since the distinction between the civilian and military officials is rather strict (the amir has both powers), only the military leaders are appointed without consultation.

The administration is sometimes twofold: party members and scholars. Yet in all cases, civil justice is the exclusive province of the

*We can call certain regions of Afghanistan tribal to the extent that an individual there identifies less by reference to a geographically defined community than by his place in a lineage. This is primarily true in the south and east of the country.

scholars (except in tribal areas) and, as almost all scholars belong to one of the fundamentalist parties, there is no clash between the two structures.

The permanent ties between the scholars maintain a horizontal structure between the members of the various parties. The scholars act as arbiters and also as an appeal against the ever-possible arbitrary decisions of a military leader of the resistance. Even if they are no longer the organizers, they are still the conscience of the resistance. The shar'iat satisfied the peasant's minimum economic demands: abolition of usury and mortgages which were a plague on the agrarian system and the end to state monopolies (like that of lapis lazuli in the Badakhshan*). Taxation is simple: 10 percent of the crops, 5 percent of wages and 20 percent of the booty (all for the Jam'iat) go to the party. If several parties compete locally, the peasant chooses his own. Above all, he can talk with the tax collector and he does. Corruption has disappeared. Because the war revived the climate of spirituality in the country, we see a kind of self-regulation in economic behavior, except among the nomads: people bargain less and are less apt to try to take advantage of the situation.

The new government can make all the promises it wants, the peasant's status in the areas held by the fundamentalists has clearly improved and even if the peasant does not share the terminology of the young intellectual, he has no reason not to follow him. The peasant did not want a revolution; he experienced injustice not as the expression of a corrupt system but as the abuse of a merchant who had impunity because of the complicity of the state apparatus. The transfer of justice from a corrupted civil servant to the quazi, considered incorruptible, ends this power, this tyranny. The return to Islam fits in well with the antistate tradition of the Afghan peasant.

Islam Against Tradition

The term "return" is ambiguous: it suggests a return to the traditional society which lives on the fringes of the state. The Islamization of society by the resistance parties goes against tradition (which is why the parties have difficulty getting established in the tribal areas which are defined by their attachment to the structures and tribal memory). The Islam of the fundamentalists is an abstract Islam; that of the Quazis, a legal Islam. In both cases, the social similarity leads to the rigorous application of norms, hence the purification of customs and traditions which, for the peasant, are an integral part of

*The shar'iat guarantees the maintenance of collective rights: water, fallow land and pasture.

the Islamic landscape. For example, the shar'iat gives a portion of an inheritance to women (which goes against most Afghan unwritten laws), is opposed to excessive dowries (in the past, a sign of prestige), forbids vendettas (the basis of the tribal code of honor) and is opposed to magic (unsuccessfully, however). Among the young intellectuals, this extends even to reopening the schools and suggesting that the education of girls is not contrary to Islam (provided there is segregation*).

It is difficult to judge the overall value of these reforms. Yet it is something very different from the defense of a society clutching its past. Revolutionary will is there to transform a society in function of an abstract definition. The revolution does not evade the question of the state's political power which is precisely what the peasant opposes. Certainly, the best resistance to the state often comes from an institution with a vocation for power (like the church in Poland). It is appropriate to examine these fundamentalist intellectuals, their background, theory, link with the fundamentalists of other countries and the ambiguity of their relationship with the peasant society and the scholars. At stake here is the future of Afghan resistance and also the meaning of fundamentalism in the Moslem world.

The Fundamentalists

The fundamentalist intellectuals are young college and high school students, trained in sciences rather than literature in Kabul (never in the West) beginning in the 70's in reaction to the Marxist ideologies which has been in favor among the Afghan students in the 60's. From the provincial petty bourgeoisie, like the Khalq communists, they had, unlike the latter, kept close ties with the rural world. They were active beginning in 1970 in the movement of Moslem youth (also called Moslem brothers). Their inspiration came from Professor Niazzi (died in 1970) who played the same role in Afghanistan that Ali Shari'ati played in Iran (in my opinion, with a common inspiration). In no way opposed to modernism, they wished to integrate it to a radical Islam, the guarantor of their identity in the face of the increasingly intolerable invasion of Western influence, in its capitalist or communist version. The slogan "neither East nor West" means that they consider the two a single variant of an industrial, materialist society.

They plunged into a recruitment campaign among the scholars, initially not very concerned about radicalization. This campaign was to end with

*Let us mention that during the Rif War, Abdel Krim likewise used the shar'iat against the tribal structures on behalf of modernism.

a period of agitation followed by a popular insurrection. Contrary to the communists, the fundamentalists gambled on campaigns immediately. They aimed at the overthrow of the old government, considered secular, nationalist and Pashtun. The fundamentalist movement had no connection with the tribal aristocracy or the landlords against whom they were fighting. This was not a conservative movement.

The planned insurrection failed in 1975 when the peasants did not follow. The fundamentalist leaders took refuge in Pakistan and were warmly welcomed by Bhutto. Several splits followed from which emerged the Hezb-e Eslami of "engineer" Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and, very much in the minority, the Jam'iat-e Eslami of Professor Rabbani (he clearly has the right to the title). Thus, at the time of the 1978 communist coup d'etat, there was a minimal but external infrastructure of resistance already in place.

Quite spontaneous internal resistance inspired by the scholars or the local chiefs in the tribal areas was rapidly reinforced by the young exiles who, after doing their homework, gained positions of responsibility. In this process, the Hezb-e Eslami, initially the strongest, lost its influence because of its sectarianism, lack of support among the scholars and lack of deference toward the peasants, overly scorned by educated youths (who in this respect committed the same mistakes as the communists). The two criteria for the intellectuals' success are their immersion in the rural world and their connections with the scholars.

The Transformation of Islam into an Ideology by the Fundamentalists

We could say that, among the fundamentalist intellectuals, Islam is more an ideology than a religion. Islam is considered more as a political model rather than viewed in spiritual terms. Fundamentalism is defined by the determination to return to the sources of Islam, disregarding all the borrowings and added traditions, to create a model society which can integrate modern technology, answer contemporary problems and do this in the single framework of Islam.

The fundamentalists reject the separation between politics and society understood among the scholars. They want power. In other words, sooner or later, fundamentalism raises the problem of the state. The state is the symbol of the unity of God which implies the unity of the community of believers (Tohid). The state, as in Hegel, is the meditation between the universal and the individual. If the one who holds the position of power only acts by delegation of the community, this position is not therefore empty. The integration of civil society into the state can be more totalitarian than the traditional exercise of power by a despotic sultan who does not claim to remodel or even define society. Totalitarianism can be born of the demand for social clarity.

We see the contrast between this ideologized Islam and the more existential religiosity of the peasant and between the rejection of the state by the latter, a rejection shared by the scholar, and the young fundamentalist's fascination with power. Yet, since the question of the state does not arise now in the resistance, it is the ideological concept of Islam which gives the fundamentalists a historical perspective and a political dynamism lacking among the Basmachis. They are not fighting to defend a world gone by but to achieve a model of society which they view ultimately as thoroughly modern, or at least apt to challenge modernism. In opposition, Marxism has ceased to be a mobilizing ideology and is reduced to an empty discourse or a sterile methodology.

We also see this among the leftist intellectuals in the resistance. They are forced into clandestinity within the resistance. Their speeches no longer make sense for the peasant and they are reduced to speaking of the fundamentalists in the same way they speak of the Soviets: identifying them with a long-gone feudal system or with an obscurantism coupled with the colonial clichés on Islam.

The Limits of Fundamentalism

The West has a negative image of fundamentalism: it is linked to Iran or al-Sadat's assassins. Yet if there is good in fundamentalism, this militant internationalism, it is far from a Moslem Comintern or even a simple homogeneity of movements. Certainly, the ideological references are generally the same--the books of the Egyptian Sa'id Qotb, the Pakistani Maududi and the Shiite Iranian Shari'ati. Yet the echo of the Afghan resistance in the fundamentalist world is weak: Iran is not interested in the Afghan resistance (the press gives more importance to Latin America) and Qadhdhafi is pro-Soviet. Although Saudi Arabia aids the resistance, it remains very uneasy about the radicalism of fundamentalists everywhere.

One deep-seated reason for the isolation of the Afghan resistance is precisely its strength: as the resistance of an entire people, it is not experiencing this phenomenon of the avant-garde by an active minority, open to the outside world and more concerned about publicizing itself as the only government than about really fighting on the ground. There is not, nor will be for a long time, an Afghan PLO.

Above all, Afghan fundamentalism is sociologically different than Iranian fundamentalism. The Iranian revolution was started by the urban masses deprived of their culture, splintered and economically weak, trained by a structured, hierarchical clergy with a vocation for power.

In Iran, turned upside down by the bulldozer of modernism, the removal of the traditional ties is replaced with the most utopic reconstructions. There is no longer an identity because there is no longer even the

memory of another society. The intellectuals are all very Westernized and are seeking to return to a world which no longer exists. Both in their clothing and vocabulary, these people who despise the West bear its marks. Then there is the search for a lost identity, impossible mergers between Islam and Marxism, and like every quest for the impossible, it ends in death. The death of the other person so as not to kill oneself. Between oneself and the double, there is always another, the devil (Sheytan), the hypocrite (monafaq) and the impure. This is suicidal anarchy.

There is no such thing in Afghanistan. The peasant society has been assaulted from abroad; it has not lost either its memory or its identity. The intellectual who fights is an "organic" intellectual: immersed in the peasant world, he retains its clothing, gestures and manners. He has retained the age-old courtesy (adab), so essential when life is primitive. The scholar is there to bring the utopian dreamer back to reality. The lack of an identity crisis leads to the absence of fanaticism. Certainly, distortions existed in the traditional society, and the market economy and the state's intrusion split the social fabric. Yet the image of oneself remained the same; nothing but an early uneasiness in the face of imperceptible distortions; the real society was slowly breaking loose from the peasant's image of it. War has reconciled the real and the image.

This explains the self-confidence which is so striking in the resistance (only some tribes seem to be experiencing an identity crisis): there is no paranoia, no political police and few summary executions. There is, concealing the uncertainty about tomorrow, a kind of plenitude and optimism. We get a feeling of unreality about a society as serene and self-confident, just a few meters from the traces of modernism.

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